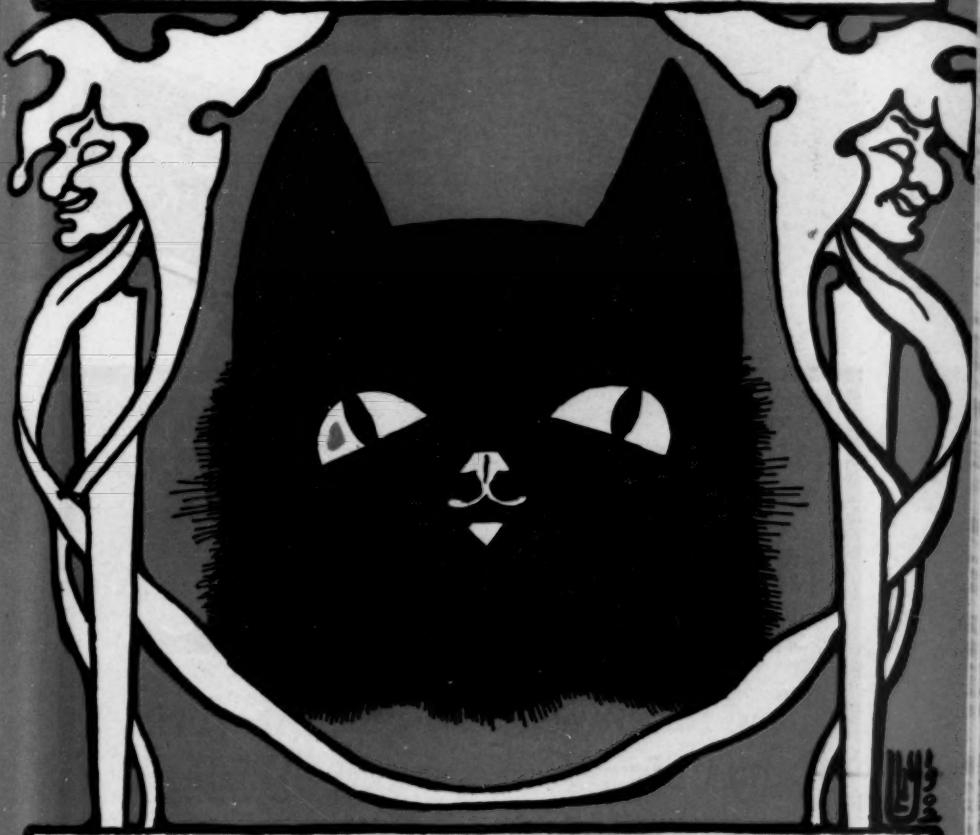
The Black Cat

JUL 17 1912



AUGUST 1912

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The Black Cat

A Monthly Magazine of Original Short Stories.

Published at 41-47 Pearl Street, Boston, Mass.

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Vol. XVII., No. 11. Whole No., 203. AUGUST, 1912 10 cents a copy $1.00 a year

Entered at the Post-Office at Boston, Mass., as second-class matter.

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The Voice From Within.*

BY LAURENCE YATES.

IT was a stupendous structure, this dam. Four years and a half it had been building. Now it was almost finished. Three months more and the last huge granite block would be cemented into place in the coping at the top of the dam's curved face, two hundred feet above the wide base buried in the river bed. Three months more and the last cubic yard of rock would be wrenched from the heart of the mountain and the third and last of the sluicing tunnels would be completed. Then the collected waters which would stretch away behind the high wall to Alma, thirteen miles north on the river, and to Echo, twelve miles east on Gallinas Creek, would be turned through the penstock into the irrigating canals and a strip of the desert half the size of Rhode Island would bloom like a rose garden of Iran.

To-night Sprague stopped, as he came out into the light from the tunnel's mouth, his day's work done, to look up at the curved, retreating face of the great wall sitting in the throat of the canyon. He was struck for the first time by its nearness to completion. He realized that, soon, his occupation, like Othello's, would be gone.

As the big driller puffed reflectively at his short-stemmed pipe, a vivid memory came to him of his first day at work there handling broken rock behind the cyclone drill, driving the holes for the blasts

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in the first of the big sluicing tunnels along the gorge side. This was before even the first stone in the dam's foundation had been laid. He had drifted into Bluewater from God-knows-where, and had applied at the dam for a job at anything. The foreman had taken one look at his huge, stoop-shouldered body and had set him at work as a mucker.

Sprague had begun his task with the idea of earning a few dollars which could be bartered for much poor whiskey at Dutch Pete's saloon; but the work appealed to his primitive nature—this cutting, tearing and wrenching of the flinty rock; this burrowing into the vitals of the mighty rampart of spotted granite. Ambition awakened in his deadened soul. He wanted to be the man who should drive the hissing, grinding, greedy thing of whirring steel which ate its way into the basaltic foundations of the mountain as easily as if the rock were cheese. So he curbed the passions of his old life and stayed on as a rock handler, winning his drill within two months.

After this there had been no desire to leave and wander as had been his custom, from town to town, from ranch to ranch, from mine to mine, earning his bread wherever there was labor needing great strength and no large amount of skill. When there had been no work for the drills he had mixed cement or manned the derrick which lifted into place for the masons the huge blocks of granite. Thus pride in the great project had grown until it became a passion, a redeeming passion. "This dam has been the making of me," he would often say in his slow way to his friend Mike Madigan, a fellow drill operator. "I wasn't much 'count 'fore I came here."

But Sprague took no credit to himself in casting off a life of vagabondage. He knew that it was simply a matter of choice; the one thing pleased him more than the other. This new mode of life, however, had developed in him a new point of view, a new line of thought. He began to have opinions. At first he talked in an easy-going way of the rights of labor and the greed of capital; then he joined the union and was more outspoken in his convictions. He came to be considered something of an agitator, and was warned several times by Schroeder, the tunnel foreman, that his tongue would get him into trouble.

Sprague's half acknowledged sentiment for his task had engendered a strong desire to keep his job, so each time the warning had been sufficient to keep him quiescent for weeks. But recently general talk of a strike had arisen—trouble over the employment of Mexican laborers—and Sprague had taken an active

part in the debates upon the question at Dutch Pete's saloon.

Schroeder, the foreman, came down the steep path.

"I haf been looking for you, Sprague. Der assistant sooperintendent vants you up at der office." The burly German hesitated, then he added:

"I guess he haf got it in for you, but understandt it ain't any of my doings."

"Sure," said Sprague, blowing out a ring of smoke. "I know who all my friends are." He walked leisurely up the pathway toward the rude, board shanty, occupied by Fleming and the other engineers.

Inside the shack a stocky, dark-haired man of thirty-five, in his shirt sleeves, was bending over a blue-print spread on the pine table, which served as a desk. He glanced up with a scowl as the driller entered.

"What do you want—oh, it's you, Sprague. Well, you are fired, that's all. Schroeder has made out your time card. Draw your pay from the cashier and then clear out."

"Fired! What for?" Sprague stopped, stupefied.

"You know what for as well as I do. You have been warned times enough about stirring up discontent among the workmen. I advised Schroeder to discharge you a month ago, but he was too chicken-hearted. Said he'd talk you out of your fool notions. But what's the result? You have worked harder than ever to make trouble for us. Now, I'm not going to stand any more of this nonsense."

Fleming leaned forward over the blue-print and extended a blunt forefinger toward Sprague.

"You can't organize a strike or talk anarchy on my job."

"I ain't organized no strike, Mistah Fleming, but it seems like a man's got a right to say what he pleases," said Sprague doggedly.

"Not when you say we should hire union men as muckers at three dollars a day when we can get Mexicans at a dollar and a half."

"Hit ain't right, tho', to keep greasers in white men's places; I'll stick to—"

"Oh, it isn't a question of right," cut in Fleming. "Some of you fellows like to make this a pretext for holding the firm up for more money. I know your game. But we won't argue farther; I've talked too much already. Schroeder will give you your time."

Sprague did not move. He gnawed at his drooping straw-colored mustache, struggling to find words to express himself; struggling with anger and that deep-rooted liking for his work

which urged him to try and placate the superintendent.

"I ain't a-honin' for a strike, Mistah Fleming, as I said before. Hit ain't me that done most of the talkin.' Of course, if the boys should vote to quit, I'd go with 'em; but hit's like this, Mistah Fleming, I've been here foh years an' a half, ever since the dam was started. I'd like to see hit through. Keep me on the job, Mistah Fleming, an' I won't have no more part in this strike talk until the boys take a vote. I'll give yo' my word."

Fleming misunderstood the Texan's motive. He snapped:

"No use in crawling. We're through with you. Move along."

"See here, Mistah Fleming, don't yo' be in too much of a hurry." A hard note had come into the soft drawl of the Texan.

"Get out of here, you big brute, or I'll have you thrown in the river." Fleming leaped up from his chair and advanced upon the driller.

Still Sprague remained motionless and the superintendent's quick temper flashed out beyond his control. He struck the huge Texan a jarring blow full in the mouth. Sprague staggered back two steps, then came at the superintendent like a wild beast.

Frightened at his own temerity in attacking the giant, Fleming no sooner saw Sprague reeling backward than he darted behind the table, intending to snatch down a revolver that hung in a holster on the wall. Then he realized there was no time to reach the gun. A three pound lump of quartz used as a paper weight lay upon the table. He seized the fragment and flung it into Sprague's face. The driller crumpled up and fell like a stunned ox.

When the Texan got to his feet, the blood pouring from an ugly cut over the left eyebrow, he found himself looking into the cold, black muzzle of Fleming's gun. He paused, all his six-feet-two of bone and sinew quivering with rage; one eye drowned in blood, the other ablaze with madness; his huge fists upraised like mallets. For a tense moment the two men faced each other thus, then Sprague said almost dispassionately, "Foh Gawd, man, I'll get you yet. See if I don't." He wheeled and went toward the door, stopping on the threshold: "If it takes till hell freezes over."

"Bosh!" retorted Fleming, lowering the gun.

The superintendent told no one of his altercation with the driller. But in alarm at the turn matters had taken he hurriedly arranged a consultation with half a dozen of the leaders in the strike agitation. The result of this meeting was a compromise: a sop in the shape of a ten per cent increase in wages declared to skilled workmen was offered and accepted, the strike leaders agreeing that they would

no longer protest against the employment of Mexicans and that they would not ask for Sprague's reinstatement.

This clinched the big driller's position as the "goat" in the whole affair, but he did not go on a drunk or attempt to make trouble. Two or three days later he sought and obtained employment as a drill operator at the Candelaria Copper Mine four miles across the valley to the northeast from Bluewater. And here at the mine Sprague's fevered hatred of Fleming developed, fanned on by a distaste for his new surroundings and by the feeling that he had been betrayed by his fellow workmen.

The work was like that to which he was accustomed, and yet it had not the same significance to him. He had grown to delight in the thought of building, in carrying forward some enduring work. Here he was engaged only in robbing the earth each day of a few tons of low grade copper ore. It seemed such a paltry thing to do. Though his labor became irksome, he did not consider taking up his former existence as a tramp; his mind turned more and more to his wrongs. They assumed undue proportions. The idea of getting square with Fleming was ever with him. It was in his nature to thirst to have it out with his enemy man to man, to beat, rend and crush him with bare hands; to take a red toll for his own blood set flowing by the cowardly lump of flying quartz.

But Sprague knew enough of the superintendent to understand that he would not be likely to catch him unawares, or at least, unarmed. Still, he began the practice of slipping across the valley in the dusk of evening and prowling for two or three hours about the little town and the dam. He caught an occasional glimpse of Fleming, but no opportunity for evening up the old score presented itself. He persisted in his visits, however, going to Bluewater as often as once a week. His rancor increased with the delay.

During these visits he noted, with an odd feeling of proprietorship, the progress of the work upon the dam. And the sharpness of his regret that he was not among those who should toil there until the end was an added source of bitterness.

The months passed and the great structure and its accessory works was all but complete. The tunnels were finished; the bronze water gates installed; ninety feet of water stood in the reservoir behind the high, curved wall.

One afternoon Sprague was laid off from work by a bilious attack. He was lying in his bunk when, immediately after supper, all his mates tramped off to Bluewater for the usual Saturday night carousal. In their absence Luis Euscabio, the Mexican cook, was

expected to remain at the bunk-house and look after Sprague as well as affairs in general at the mine. But the gang had not been gone half an hour when Sprague saw Luis, dressed in his best velveteens and sombrero, pass the open doorway cautiously and head down the Bluewater trail. He guessed that the Mexican was going to keep a tryst with old man Lopez's daughter at the village.

The big driller was pretty much at his ease now. An irresistible impulse seized him to go to Bluewater himself. He got up at once and was soon striding down the trail toward the town. On his arrival there, he skirted the line of scattered dwellings and stores, and took his way toward the great dam in the canyon beyond.

As he descended the path leading down the granite side of the gorge, he had one fair look at the vast structure. One moment he saw the curved, retreating wall of gray rock, the wide spillways at either side, the black, gaping mouths of the surplus water tunnels at the river edge, the penstock and the power house in the immediate foreground in the depth of the gorge; the next moment the swiftly falling darkness filled the canyon and merged all into one gray blur.

Sprague made his way along the familiar paths of the ridge side until he came to the wheel pit which controlled the water gates of the tunnels far below, in the core of the rock. He paused there for a moment and chanced to drop a ponderous hand upon one of the wheels, pulling on it slightly. The wheel moved under his hand.

"Hum!" he grunted, "some one's forgot to look that wheel, but hit ain't none of my business, tho'."

He turned back down the pathway. At length, he found himself on the ridge slope forty yards above the mouth of the lower tunnel, and then the murmur of men's voices rose from the bottom of the gorge below him. One had a harsh, strident, familiar note. It was Fleming. He listened with strained ears.

"I lost my watch fob this afternoon. I think it must have been while I was in the lower tunnel just before quitting time. I'm going to look for it. I won't be long—not over ten or fifteen minutes."

"You'll want a lantern," a second voice said, evidently the watchman.

"No; I have my flash-light."

There was a bright glow in the dusk below.

As Sprague sensed the import of Fleming's words, his even-flowing pulse began to tingle. The sound of the detested voice had already stirred the beast in him. Quickly the plan matured in his fermenting brain. Fleming alone in the four-hundred-foot tunnel for a quarter of an hour; the wheel controlling the water gate

unlocked. It appeared that the devil himself had prepared the death trap.

Sprague hesitated just a moment. He had never sought to take Fleming at such a disadvantage. While he had been harboring murder in his heart, he had thought only to meet his adversary face to face, bare knuckle against fist. But was this opportunity to be passed over? Chance at last had delivered Fleming into his hands. If he did not strike might not the man ever after stand shielded by his kind or by fire-arms? His hatred burned within him like the flow of molten lava in his veins.

Sprague saw the glow of Fleming's flash-light at the mouth of the tunnel, then he crept silently as a shadow up the pathway toward the wheel pit. He laid hands upon the unlocked wheel and waited, breathless, until he was sure Fleming had penetrated well towards the tunnel head. Suddenly he spun the wheel around with deft hands and the ponderous gate in the shaft one hundred and forty feet below moved upward. There was a clank of metal; then a soft murmur arose as the pent-up water moved through the widening exit.

Sprague turned like a demon at the wheel and the murmur of the released water swelled from the pit as the diapason of a mighty but distant organ. It grew into a sullen roar. The wheel stopped under his hand with a dull clang; the gate was wide open; a nine-foot stream of mad water was boiling through the tunnel.

The big driller released the wheel and fled along the slope toward the mesa. He gained the table-land and ran on for some distance. At length, he paused for breath and to listen. He was far out of sight and hearing of anything that might be taking place at the dam. He dared to hope that he had escaped unseen. It occurred to him that he must turn south and take the beaten road leading between Bluewater and Candelaria, for he must not leave a telltale trail in the dry, powdered surface of the mesa.

There was no one at the bunk-house when Sprague reached it. He sought his bunk and threw off his clothes. It seemed that he had lain there for years when he heard a step outside the open door. He feigned sleep. The step came on and a man paused in the doorway.

"Holy Virgin! how the pig snores!" a voice murmured in Spanish. It was only Luis, returned from his love-making.

Yet another eternity and the gang from Bluewater came tramping up the trail.

"What the devil you up for, Luis? Moonin' round here all night

over old Lopez's girl, I'll be bound." It was the voice of Dave Crawford, the mine foreman.

"Oh, no, Senor, not that! The starlight, he so beautiful," gurgled Luis.

"How's Sprague?"

"He's—ah—he's much better," stammered Luis. "I go in to look at him every half hour all the evening and he asleep all the time."

And Sprague, listening in his bunk, heard Luis's white lie with a deep and fervid joy. Chance had provided the alibi.

Then scores of men streamed into the room, and arousing Sprague, as they thought, they told him that Fleming had been drowned in the tunnel. No one knew, they said, who had opened the water gates. The watchman had been caught in the flood at the tunnel mouth and barely escaped with his life.

Sprague heard this news, too, with much grim satisfaction. He settled back nonchalantly into his bunk; within a half hour he was asleep.

The death of the superintendent was the biggest sensation in the history of the dam. The inevitable hue and cry for the murderer went abroad; Jackling & Son, the contractors, posted a reward of $5,000; detectives were imported from Kansas City; the local sheriff bestirred himself to unwonted activity. But results were lacking.

Sprague remained calmly at Candelaria and waited for the storm to roll over. He was particularly untroubled by remorse, but at times he was haunted by a feeling that knowledge of his crime must come to light. Two months passed, and no suspicion falling upon him, he was no longer worried by a misgiving of any sort.

Then one morning he awoke just as the dawn was whitening the East. All the others in the room were snoring in their bunks. He sat up with a puzzled air. Had he heard that sound, or was he dreaming? He listened intently. There was nothing audible but the heavy breathing of his mates. He dropped back to his pillow, impatient that he should even entertain such an idea.

But the sensation came again. Sprague sat bolt upright, his eyes widened with fear. For the sound that he heard was like the soft murmur of flowing water, like the smothered murmur of water moving deep under ground. For fully a half minute the sound purred in his ears. He could not be mistaken.

"God," he whispered huskily. "I believe I—" he broke off, refusing to formulate the thought.

He arose from his bunk and began to dress with shaking hands.

He went outside and stood listening, every nerve tense. He heard nothing now.

The cool breeze blew fresh and sweet into his nostrils. The awakening world was very still. A hundred yards beyond, on the slope of the ruddy hillside, the stack of the ore crusher rose, a giant monolith against the grey sky of the dawn. Silence hung over the one high structure and the half a dozen low buildings all drab and weather-beaten, clustered about the stack's base. A black plume of smoke, the only sign of awakening activity, trailed upward from the chimney top.

Sprague dashed the cold sweat from his forehead with a sweep of his right hand.

"It was only a dream," he muttered, and turned back into the bunk-house.

At seven o'clock he entered the mine. All day he drove at his work with feverish haste. What with the whirring and the grinding of his drill and what with the rending shock of the explosions, his ears were flooded with material sounds, and there was no place for that tinkling murmur of a distant water flow.

After supper that night, as he sat smoking with others of the gang outside the bunk-house, Sprague suddenly sensed the return of the thing he feared. His strong teeth bit with a snap through the stem of his pipe, and his big, gnarled fingers closed upon the arms of his chair like a vice. The sound this time was distinct, yet not a reality. It was like the echo of a waterfall. Its haunting cadence came to him again and again.

He arose from his chair with feigned deliberation, knocked the ashes from his pipe noisily against the side of the bunk-house, and walked away into the darkness. When he was out of sight of the others, he hurried with nervous step out into the silence of the mesa. There he stopped to listen. Yet there in the stillness the soft swelling cadence of rushing water smote upon his ears. Yes; no. He would not own it was so. He was a fool. It was nothing but nerves, he argued. How could he hear water? He was miles from the nearest stream; even the water used at the mine came by pipe line.

He strode on impatiently as if intending to leave the thing behind. But he could not escape the sound. Ever the distant flow of water purred in his ears. He tried to locate its source, and then he had a fancy that it came from the direction of Bluewater—from the dam. Again he cursed himself for a fool and stalked on in the gloom. But the fancy persisted.

Suddenly, with an oath, he turned back toward the bunk-house. All that night he tossed and twisted, sleepless in his bed. He went into the mine the next morning gaunt and hollow-eyed, to find, he hoped, relief in work. But he obtained no respite there; for the murmur in his ears had grown more distinct. He began to hear it even above the clatter of his drill.

Then the desire to fly from the vicinity took possession of him. A sudden suspicion, however, that his fellow workers were watching him led him to curb this impulse. He must do nothing irrational; nothing that might attract attention and betray him. So with all the inherent stubbornness of his nature he fought down the desire.

There followed insufferable days and more insufferable nights. The strain told physically as well as mentally upon the huge Texan. He lost in weight; his face grew lean and lined; an unsteady flame burned in his round, gray eyes. Saturday night came and Sprague was face to face with Sunday, when there would be no work to distract, even in a measure, his mind. The unreasoning impulse for flight, the longing to be beyond the reach of any spying human eye, clamored within him stronger than ever; he yielded. He drew the back pay due him, packed his few possessions into a bundle and slipped away into the darkness.

He swung off to the northeast over the semi-arid table-land. All night he hurried along; on over barren, rocky ridges; across bare, sun-baked stretches of plain, under the black dome of the sky ablaze with the jewelled legions of the stars. But the silence of the lonely plain afforded no relief; the murmuring voice of the water still pursued him.

Occasionally he muttered incoherently; from time to time he paused to look back over his shoulder. Yet there was nothing that he expected to see. Indeed, he would have welcomed the advent of something tangible; something that he could understand and struggle against; something at which he could strike back. He was helpless against this—this what? This wraith of a sound!

The dawn found Sprague on the crest of a high ridge, thin-sown with pinons. He halted to face the East. The sky there gleamed white above the dark green of the low, forest-clad mountains. In a moment opalescent banners began to stream upward from the horizon to the zenith; then the whole eastern arch of the heavens flushed crimson, and a great blood-red sun rose from the bosom of the distant range.

In a clear light of the new day, he felt his mood change. The craving to be moving was leaving him. He was weary beyond all

expression; it seemed that he was a thousand years old. A mesquite bush beside him offering shade, he crawled under it, and almost immediately sank into unconsciousness.

The fugitive awoke early in the afternoon, much refreshed, but very hungry and thirsty. Below him the desert rolled away, eighty, ninety miles to the mountains north and east. It was absolutely uninhabited country. He had no food, no water, but he felt a strange reluctancy to turn aside from the direction in which he was leading. It seemed to him that in holding to the northwest he was putting Candelaria, Bluewater, the dam and all that pertained to it so much farther behind.

He plunged down the slope and struck out across the desert. The heat was intense. There was absolute silence on the desolate plain, save for the crunching of his feet on the dry earth; save for that dull roar of water in his ears. This cadence of a rushing flood was all the more startling in that waterless waste. Surely it was growing louder, nearer. From somewhere off there behind him it swelled hauntingly, almost menacingly. He hurried forward with all his strength, yet it was of no avail—the hissing, gurgling, muffled water flowed after him.

At length, the sound took the form of words. It whispered ghastly phrases, horrible insinuations. It lisped a tale of a drowned man, fishy-eyed and bloated, floating on the shimmering surface of the river, back there in the Southwest. It hinted of things unspeakable. Then Sprague's nerve gave way. He wheeled abruptly and took up his back trail.

Bartlett, the resident engineer, was seated behind Fleming's old desk in the rough board shanty below the dam. A hastening step came up the pathway. Then the figure of a man bulked large in the open doorway—a tall, dust-powdered, dishevelled figure, with gaunt, gray face and flaming eyes. The engineer looked up from his work with a question in his glance.

"You are the new superintendent?" the man in the doorway asked hoarsely.

"No; I'm the resident engineer. The dam has just been completed by the contractors."

"Then you are in charge?"

Bartlett nodded.

"You know about the drowning of the superintendent?"

"Of course."

"I'm Sprague," the driller said with slow emphasis; "I'm the man who turned the water into the tunnel upon Fleming."

He sank wearily into a chair, then collapsed upon the floor, worn to exhaustion by lack of food and sleep.

"It's a very curious case," the young doctor said, when Bartlett called at the physician's home. "The man remained unconscious for some time after I had him brought to my office. Then, as soon as he came to his senses, he began to rave about the sound of water roaring in his ears. I thought at first it was delirium caused by sunstroke. I made an examination and I decided to operate. He should be out from under the anæsthetic now. I want you to come in and see him."

The boyish physician led the way to the bedroom, rubbing his hands with satisfaction.

The huge driller lay on a cot, swathed about the head in white linen, like an Arab. He was conscious. The doctor's wife watched beside him.

"How do you feel, my man?" the doctor began. "You—"

"It's gone," interrupted Sprague, "I don't hear a whisper. Won't it come back?"

"No," said the physician with decision. "The knife took away all that." He turned to the engineer.

"It was slow inflammation of the cochlea, the interior division of the internal ear, you know. The nerves were caused to vibrate continually and produce the sensation of sound—of a sound, curiously enough, like flowing water."

Sprague's startled eyes looked out from under the bandage and met Bartlett's gaze. He sat up in bed with an awful cry; his big hands flashed to his head. He tore at the strips of linen with unmistakable purpose.

But the doctor threw himself upon the driller, seized his wrists and bore him back upon the cot. Then weakness conquered the giant, and he lay back very still upon the pillow.

A Street-Car Idyll.*

BY MARY MACMILLAN.

IT was spring and not caring especially for time she got on a surface car and took a seat by an open window. She was dressed in a suit of so pale a gray it seemed almost white and her personality suggested white wild cherry blossoms—she seemed to bear the charm of them. As with them there was with her a freshness and delicacy one dared not touch for fear of withering or tarnishing, an alluring sweetness and yet a faintly, pungently intoxicating aroma of wildness and wilfulness.

She sat looking out of the window at the wonderful new grass, at the silver green of the poplars and the golden green of the willows in the park they were passing, until she noticed a young man who was alone a little distance in front of her.

There was something nice in the fit of his rough Scotch Cheviot coat and in the clean brown of his neck. She remembered him as an artist she had met at a little Dutch supper. Since then she had seen him two or three times on the street and his manners had been curiously contradictory. He either bowed with unpleasant coldness or he didn't bow at all but smiled with absurdly unreasonable delight. It nettled her. Queer person, she thought, but a particularly good-looking and attractive person!

Now was her chance. If she could only get at him perhaps she would be able to delve into his soul and find out what moved him to such strange extremes. She turned in her seat and coughed but he continued to sit in the immovable repose only a very healthy and strong man can achieve. Then she tested the old trick of trying to hypnotize him by concentrating her gaze and thought upon him, and surely, surely, in the beat of a few seconds he turned about slowly and the level look from his eyes came straight into hers. He smiled—oh, there was no doubt about his mood this time—and raised his hat high in air in a sort of old-fashioned lordly salute.

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"Good morning," she said, and there was a softness in her voice as delighting as the new green of spring.

He rose and came back. "May I?" he asked.

"I was trying to see if I could attract your attention by staring at the back of your head," she said, making room for him.

"I am glad the back of my head was so responsive," he replied.

"It was more so than your face has been—sometimes."

He stared at her. "My face doesn't look paralyzed or anything?" he asked, stroking his nose interrogatively.

"It has seemed, sometimes, not exactly paralyzed but frozen."

The look he gave her was at first puzzled, then quizzical. But no one could look at her long without smiling. "You are not flattering," he said.

"Well, it isn't flattering, is it, to meet an acquaintance and have him look at you as the North Pole might have looked at Peary?" she answered with a delicious little shiver.

"Maybe the North Pole made a mistake and thought it was Cook—all fur coats must look alike to a North Pole, you know. Mistaken identity and all that sort of thing. But even if I don't know the fellow, the next time he treats you that way send him to me." There was silence for a few moments, then he cleared his throat in a manner wholly unnecessary for his voice was as pure as a deep-toned bell. "How do you like acting?" he asked.

She started. She didn't know that the question was a barefaced hazard on his part, and it was her turn to look puzzled.

"Of course you must remember what I told you about that?" she answered, sweetly ingenuous, and not throwing the light on the subject he could have wished.

"Yes, of course, I must," he said with a far-away gaze which looked reminiscent but wasn't. It was upon a huge bed of hyacinths which had nothing to do with the case. They were perfect enough in a bloom of ravishing array of color, purple and lavender, yellow and violet and rose—but they didn't help him and neither did she. "You are quite right about it," he went on, "but when you proceed from success to success so rapidly, it is hard to remember and keep track."

What on earth did he mean? She had never acted even in amateur theatricals in her life. He couldn't—could he—refer to her philanthropic work in physical culture classes at the Settlement? Physical culture couldn't be interpreted as acting even in the most extravagant phraseology a genius might be expected to use. She remembered he was a genius. She turned to look at him for further

elucidation but his firm lips did not move. He was such a well-groomed genius! He looked far more like a Greek athlete, she thought, and she liked him better and better.

"You must have seen the notice I received in the paper," she said.

"*See* it?" he answered. "I *sensed* it." It seemed as if he gave a sigh of relief. "It was wonderful but not anything like what you deserved."

She looked at him narrowly. The notice had been a trifling three lines in the social column of a newspaper. It was quite plain he was lying—lying outrageously. But why? She was illuminated suddenly with comprehension. He had forgotten her and was pretending to remember her! There came into her beautiful dreamy eyes a look that appeared gently pitying, but it wasn't—not at all. If the unconscious young fellow by her side had understood it he might have felt constrained to jump from the car at the next corner.

"What would you have said?" she asked with soft appeal.

"I? Oh, I should have said *everything*. I should have placed you on a pedestal and then thrown wreaths at the foot of the pedestal. Perhaps I should have said too much—I am altogether prejudiced," he said prettily and humbly. Oh, the young villain!

"How did you like my 'Candida'?" she asked.

He was walking on the edge of a great gulf. "I—I didn't see that," he answered, and for the moment was saved.

"But that was the play my notice was about."

He mopped his brow. "Yes, of course, certainly."

"Yet you say the notice didn't do me justice. How can you know if you didn't see the play?"

"I—I," he knew that he had fallen into the gulf with a great splash and was floundering miserably. Still there was a straw to cling to. "I judged by the other things you have done; I knew this must be even better," he said with a smile of temporary relief.

"Which of my characters do you like best?" she asked, looking up at him with naive modesty.

"I have such a wretched memory for names," he replied, fencing desperately.

"Well, then, which play do you like best?"

"My frailty of memory extends even to plays. Could you mention some?"

" 'She Stoops to Conquer,' " she answered sweetly. "Do you like that?"

"Oh, tremendously!"

"Then you *did* see that?" she gave him a searching look and he

felt himself growing hotter. "How did you like my leading man?"

"Oh, poor! He couldn't, of course, play up to you."

Ingenuous young liar that he was! She would get even with him. "It is strange that you should think so," she said. "It seemed to us too good to be true that we should get him—a great professional like him to act in our dramatic school for a little charity performance. I don't believe we could have had him if it hadn't been for the accident. Of course you heard of that?"

Accident? Accident? Swords and pistols! What accident? He felt the blood mounting to his face as she scrutinized it calmly. "Oh, yes, certainly, every one heard of that," he declared.

"Do you think it marred his presence?"

He mopped his brow again. If the kindly gods would only vouchsafe a hint as to the nature of the accident! There was nothing for it but to venture again. "Well, of course, he limped a little," he remarked mildly.

"Limped?" she cried. "Why, the golf-ball hit him in the eye!"

"Yes, to be sure, it did. I remember perfectly now that you mention it. It was his eye that was black and blue."

"Still you don't seem to remember so very perfectly. It didn't show at all because of the bandage. The doctor wouldn't let him go without a bandage for weeks, and he asked to wear my sleeve over the bandage."

"That's like the impudence of some fellows!"

"Impudence? Why, I thought it was beautiful—a bit of old-fashioned chivalry one doesn't even dare to hope for in the modern man."

"But these erratic guys who call themselves artists are hardly in the class with real modern men."

"That is an awfully strange remark to be made by you."

"Why?"

"Why, of course, because you are one."

"One what?"

"An artist, naturally."

"*I* an artist?"

"Why, yes, certainly, aren't you?" There was beginning to be about as much petulance in her voice as there ought to be of paprica in a salad dressing.

"No, I am not an artist," he answered with simple decision.

So he was *not* an artist when he was one and she *was* an actress when she was distinctly not one! She turned in amazement to look at him. He sat with folded arms by her side, his splendid American

adaptation of the Greek profile turned to face the line of vacant seats in front of them, and giving not the vaguest indication either of sudden insanity or of the brazen impudence such a downright lie needed to carry it through.

Was he perhaps preposterously modest?

"But truly you are an artist! I went only yesterday to see your pictures that are on exhibition at the Institute. You have to be an artist to get in there."

"I have no pictures at the Art Institute."

Was he ridiculing her so openly? She was beginning to be angry. "Why, how can you deny it?" she exclaimed. "I have seen them with my own eyes—read your peculiar signature. And they are the very pictures you told me about."

"No, I never told you about any of my pictures because I haven't any."

"I don't understand you," she said with all the lovely but stinging frost of a wintry morning. "Why should you deny it?"

"Because it's true—I don't paint." There was a whimsical, almost a pathetic expression in his face—the consummate young scapegrace that he was! It incensed her even more. She rose and stood above him like the grace of a branch of cherry blossoms.

"You are perfectly insufferable!" she flamed. "You have been pretending to know me when you don't remember me at all. You have tangled yourself up in a perfect network of lies. I was never on any stage in my life—and I never acted in the plays you had the impertinence to discuss—and there never was a leading man—and he didn't have an accident—and never begged to wear my sleeve—and there were no notices—and why on earth should you deny being what you are? You are perfectly insufferable! And I am going to get out!"

"Oh, please, won't you let me—," he called, but the spray of wild blossoms was caught in a whirlwind of anger and she was past him and out and away. He swung himself off the car after her. "Hold on!" he was calling prosaically, "wait a minute! Won't you let me explain? It's that confounded brother of mine—we're twins, we're exactly alike, you know. He's always getting me into messes—though thank Heaven for this one! You must have met him somewhere. He's the artist, I'm only the ex-football player and present business man of the family. Won't you forgive me?"

They were standing on the street corner now but she looked up at him with her wildwood eyes and the corner became a garden of Eden. "But why did you put me on the stage?" she asked.

"I had been for some time making a desperate effort to find out your name and I couldn't let a chance slip. I guessed you were a girl he knows who is clever in amateur theatricals, so I tried that tack."

"I am nothing so interesting," she said, but his eyes boldly denied her statement.

"So I am not an actress and you are not an artist. Well?"

"Well, it's a pretty good bond of sympathy to begin with, isn't it?" he grinned happily. "You will forgive me, won't you?"

"If you'll forgive me," and the charm of blossoms was all about him. "But I've got to go into town."

"May I go with you?" he asked, and as he stepped out, big and strong and buoyant and handsome, to hail the coming car, she wondered—yes, she wondered!

A Love Trail.*

BY JAMES FRANCIS DWYER.

IT was a cold, raw morning in February when Isobel Biddle invaded New York. The North River punched the ferry boat with huge blocks of ice as it rolled towards the Manhattan shore, the houses peered at the girl from under heavy cowls of snow, and between the Pennsylvania ferry and the street car there was a sea of cold slush that made her teeth chatter as she contemplated it. Any ordinary girl, not possessing rubber boots, might have wept on the bank of that ocean of icy mud, but Miss Isobel Biddle was not an ordinary girl. She had journeyed from Philadelphia to find a fortune in the metropolis, and she was not dismayed.

When she arrived at Twenty-third Street she had in her possession one five-dollar bill and a new cent. The former she tendered to the car conductor, but that person's hands were so cold that he evaded the trouble of changing the bill by allowing the girl to ride free. The new cent was exchanged for a morning paper.

Isobel Biddle was following a well-established precedent by purchasing the paper. All the successful fortune hunters, whose lives she had studied, had invariably bought a paper on their arrival in the city that intuition told them would shower its wealth upon them. And Isobel was certain that she would find a fortune on Manhattan Island. So strong was this feeling that she thought there might be a probability of stubbing her toes against hidden wealth while wading through the pool of cold mud, and she shuffled her feet to give Destiny every possible chance.

Of course, in bringing five dollars in her pocket she knew that she was not following the precedent set by those same fortune seekers. It is a well-known fact that all millionaires have

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met the smile of the goddess when they were jingling their last few cents, but, while regretting her own comparatively wealthy position, the girl consoled herself with the knowledge that she was not to blame. It was part of a sum of money that her father had not time to invest in the Caraccas Colonizing Company before that concern closed its doors. The remainder had paid the funeral expenses of the trusting old man, whose death followed the failure of the company that had swindled him out of his money and made his daughter homeless.

But Isobel Biddle was not dismayed. Her very inexperience gave her courage to face a future that would have unnerved girls of less gentle rearing. As she rode up on the car she wondered if it would not have been better for her own chances if she had arrived in that final-cent stage to which Fortune is supposed to reduce her devotees whom she intends to honor. She was confident that the goddess would smile upon her before that cold day came to an end, but she decided to hold the five dollar bill lest her claims might be inadvertently overlooked.

She found a little pillbox apartment in Seventeenth Street, and while drying her stockings on the radiator, she looked over the "Female Help Wanted" columns in the paper she had purchased. Her eyes wandered up and down long stepladders of advertisements where cooks, housekeepers and laundresses were called for in thirty-cent calls, but an advertisement in the second column continually pulled her gaze from the purely domestic openings that awaited the industrious. This advertisement read:

> LADY DETECTIVE WANTED. Intelligent young lady of refinement and education wanted for work of a delicate and confidential nature. Apply Fitzhardinge, Room 3176, Telamo Building.

Miss Biddle read it a score of times. It seemed to be linked up with something in her inner consciousness. It appeared to be a finger that beckoned her, and finally she decided that in some mysterious way her eyes had been directed to the advertisement as the first step up the ladder of wealth that she knew was near. She walked to the nearest telegraph office and sent a wire to the advertiser. The telegram ran as follows:

> Please do not engage lady to fill position till you see me. ISOBEL BANKS BIDDLE, 161 West Seventeenth street.

The girl was delighted with her move. She reasoned that the telegram would push her up from the rest of the applicants and prevent the advertiser from making a final selection till he had interviewed her, and consoled by this thought she took a downtown car and alighted before the Telamo. She found room 3176, an unfurnished room, half a mile above Broadway, and in it were five young women awaiting the arrival of Mr. Fitzhardinge. Miss Biddle glanced at the five from the other side of the corridor, and then made up her mind to a course of action that she regretted afterwards. For the moment she refused to listen to her conscience, and in that moment she acted.

There was a little office table in a corner near a closed door that led, as the girl surmised, to the private room of Mr. Fitzhardinge, and, taking off her hat as she entered, she walked over boldly and placed it upon the table. Then turning to the five women she addressed them.

"The young lady that Mr. Fitzhardinge required for the position is already here," she said glibly, "therefore, ladies, it will be useless for you to wait any longer."

Isobel Biddle's conscience attacked her furiously, but it was too late. The words were out. The five women rose together, and muttering uncomplimentary remarks concerning the innocent Fitzhardinge, they marched down the corridor to the elevator. The girl was ashamed, and yet exultant. An undefinable feeling told her that Fate had booked her for the post.

Five minutes afterward another woman came, a fat, innocent-looking creature, and Miss Biddle repeated the message that she had told the others. A sense of shame made her offer the late-comer her car fare, and the Philadelphian was overjoyed when it was accepted. She tried hard to convince herself that the half-dozen women were not fitted for the position, but an accusing conscience made her very uncomfortable.

Mr. Fitzhardinge came at last and seemed much surprised at finding a solitary applicant. He questioned Isobel closely, and

while doing so, a messenger brought the telegram that she had forwarded from up town. The girl's foresight pleased Fitzhardinge. He remarked that he always considered Philadelphians slow people, and laughed good-humoredly when the applicant assured him that there were some who could be pretty spry on occasions. While she was impressing this fact upon him, one of the women that she had dispersed returned for an umbrella that had been forgotten, and for a moment Miss Biddle was horrified at the thought that Fitzhardinge might receive voluntary testimony regarding her smartness, but the other only muttered an excuse, grabbed her umbrella and departed hurriedly. Fortune was dealing kindly with Isobel Biddle.

Fitzhardinge considered a moment, then scribbled an address upon a card and handed it to the girl.

"Call there, Miss Biddle," he said, "and tell Mrs. Victor Willoughby that I sent you."

The address given was on the Riverside Drive, and an hour afterwards the pretty fortune-hunter from Philadelphia was ushered into the private boudoir of Mrs. Willoughby. The prospective employer attracted the girl immediately. Naturally impulsive, she was struck by the beauty of the little woman who wished to retain her services, and when Mrs. Willoughby took her hand and led her to a chair, Isobel Biddle became her slave.

But the finding out of her duties proved to be a difficult matter. Half a dozen times Mrs. Willoughby attempted to tell the girl her reasons for requiring her services, but each time hysterical sobs choked her utterance. Miss Biddle endeavored to soothe her, but her efforts were in vain.

At last, after much probing, she managed to gather the facts, and the smile that passed across her face made the little lady indignant at the manner in which her tale of woe was received. But Isobel Biddle could not restrain the smile. The story seemed so ridiculous that she thought Fate had purposely turned her work-hunting expedition into a fiasco to repay her for her underhanded methods in dealing with competitors for the post. Some discharged servant or other evil-disposed person had written Mrs. Willoughby an anonymous letter in which were trifling accusations against her husband's character, and instead of handing the letter over to her

lord and master, as a sensible woman would do, she conceived the perfectly childlike idea of having the poor man shadowed!

Miss Isobel Biddle pitied the little woman down whose cheeks tears were rolling, and with the wisdom of a girl of twenty-one tried to argue against her childish course. But Mrs. Willoughby was determined to sift the matter in her own way. She shook her head at the pleadings that the Philadelphian advanced, and at last Miss Biddle consented. She felt perfectly convinced that there was no truth in the worthless innuendos, and, looking at the matter from a selfish point of view, she thought it might be Destiny's round-about way of leading her up the staircase to the golden throne of the goddess of fortune. She accepted the twenty dollars that Mrs. Willoughby handed to her for expenses, and she promised to make a report in three days' time. The impulsive girl was so full of pity for her employer that she had much difficulty in restraining herself from kissing the tear-wet face as she bade the little woman good-by.

It did seem a ridiculous affair to Isobel Biddle as she made her way down town that February morning, but still she was pleased that she had obtained the position. The plight of the little child-wife touched the heart of the girl, and, at times, she combatted conscience and refused to be sorry for the trick she had played in obtaining the position. She imagined herself a special instrument of Fate brought all the way from the city of brotherly love to help the little wife in her distress, and she became important in her own eyes.

A half-formed suggestion to lay the matter before Mr. Willoughby was hastily put aside when the startled eyes of the wife came up before her imagination. By telling the husband she would be betraying the trust that Mrs. Willoughby had imposed in her, and feeling perfectly certain that the contents of the anonymous letter were false, Miss Isobel Biddle determined to do what she had agreed upon. She would trail Mr. Willoughby and report his movements to his wife. She felt certain that there would be nothing incriminating in his actions, and it was with a certain amount of pride in her own work as a smoother-down of matrimonial troubles that she stepped from the car at Forty-second Street.

Mrs. Willoughby had informed the girl that her husband was a member of the Tarquin Club, and to the Tarquin Isobel repaired. With the aid of a dollar bill that she slipped into the hand of the hall porter, she located Mr. Willoughby, and two hours after her engagement she started to record his movements.

Isobel Biddle realized on that first evening in New York that the possession of too much knowledge is not conducive to peace of mind. She reached her little bedroom long after midnight and threw herself on the bed in an agony of remorse. The pursuit of the stylishly dressed man had brought about a series of shocks that completely unnerved her. She was the possessor of information that she would have given worlds to be ignorant of. She reproached herself a thousand times for not seeking a position as a clerk instead of interfering with the private affairs of others, and she tried in vain to forget what her sleuth tactics had taught her. As she looked at the notes in the little book that she had bought for the purpose, tears fell upon the pages and left them blotched and lumpy. The notes read:

> TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12:—Mr. Willoughby left Tarquin Club at 2.35 P. M. and took an up-town car to Seventy-fourth Street. Called at the home of Mr. Justice Winchope and stayed one hour and ten minutes. Returned to Tarquin, and did not leave there till 7.30. Took a cab to Froissart apartment house at Fifty-ninth Street, and was there joined by tall brunette wearing blue opera-cloak. They were driven to Manhattan Opera House where Calvé was appearing in Carmen. Under the light, the lady appeared to be about twenty-five years of age, had small mouth, slightly tilted nose and big blue eyes. She made use of the words "My dear Mr. Willoughby" on two separate occasions when protesting against unnecessary expenditure, clung affectionately to his arm, and during the performance she seemed much interested in his conversation. After the play they supped at Letrolli's, laughing and conversing gaily during the meal, and then Mr. Willoughby escorted the lady back to the Froissart. He returned to the Tarquin at 12.30 A. M.

And Isobel Biddle, fresh from Philadelphia, had smiled when little Mrs. Willoughby had read her the poisonous innuendos contained in the anonymous letter! She had been stabbed with the sword of knowledge and writhed in agony. Again and again she asked herself what right had Willoughby to take another woman to the opera and sup with her afterwards, and each time that she put the question Imagination pictured the face of the little golden-haired woman when she heard the news. But who would acquaint Mrs. Willoughby? Isobel Biddle comforted herself with tearful assertions that she would never be guilty of

carrying such news, and then she sobbed herself to sleep. In her dreams she pursued Victor Willoughby through space in a chariot drawn by three demon steeds, the sparks from whose hoofs blinded her when she tried to take notes of his movements.

Next morning she looked in vain for a way out of the predicament in which pride had placed her. She thought of sending a letter of resignation to Mrs. Willoughby, but found on counting her money that she had expended one-third of the twenty dollars that had been given her for expenses. Calvé and Letroli had chained her to the position. She must either give back the money or the results, and if the former course was impossible, the latter was even more so. She had no friends to pay off her indebtedness, and she had no jewelry to pawn. She had come to sack the city of the Philistines without resources of any kind, and Fate had her in a jiu-jitsu grip before she had time to strike a blow. This is your return, quoth Conscience — this is the result of your stupid desire to shine in paths that you were never intended to walk in.

The girl was stupified with her position. It looked as if the Isobel Biddle who started out to sweep innuendoes from the reputations of giddy New Yorkers, would, in all probability, figure as a witness in the divorce court. Imagination pictured the headings of the yellow journals, and the leaded type danced on the dirty wall paper of her little room: "Victor Willoughby trailed by Girl Sleuth from Philadelphia. Isobel Biddle's Story of the Lady with the Blue Cloak!"

She could not eat any breakfast, and with red eyes and throbbing head she took the car to Forty-second Street. There was no way of escape visible. She had to go on with the work — the horrible, detestable work.

The hall porter again informed her that Willoughby was inside, and half an hour afterwards, from her position on the opposite side of the street, she saw him come out and hail a taxicab. Miss Biddle set her lips and, jumping into another, pursued him. Despair set on the dashboard and grinned at her. The wheels of the machine ground out an endless chuckle, as if amused at her misfortunes. Imagination pilloried the girl on a rack of horrible possibilities, and she sobbed again as the car rushed in the direc-

tion of the Bronx. She knew now that she had been a fool to offer herself as a straightener-out of crossed matrimonial threads. She knew that her depleted purse made it impossible for her to leave the position that was now unbearable.

It was a day of horror for Isobel Biddle. She rushed from one end of Manhattan to the other, and her quarry speedily convinced her that he knew every place that was worth knowing, besides a considerable number that, through lack of information, she had to enter as doubtful. The island was an open book with frayed edges to Mr. Willoughby, and the girl's notebook bulged with information.

It was about nine o'clock that evening when Isobel Biddle followed Willoughby aboard a west-bound car at the intersection of Broadway and Fourteenth Street. The girl was bodily and mentally sick. She was unstrung, tired and dispirited. All her ambition had deserted her. She had no desire to conquer New York. Her supreme wish was to leave it as soon as possible, but alas, she owed Mrs. Willoughby twenty dollars, and she had but five dollars and forty cents in her possession. There was the notebook full of information that would be valuable to the little woman on Riverside Drive, but Isobel Riddle had made up her mind that the notebook should never reach Mrs. Willoughby. Tired and dispirited she determined as the car sped along, that she would burn the book the moment she reached home, and then, by obtaining a position as a waitress, she would endeavor to pay back the money without giving an explanation as to the manner in which it had been expended.

The car had just started, after stopping at the intersection of Eighth Avenue, when Willoughby made a dash to the rear platform and stepped nimbly off. The girl could never explain what stirred her to follow him. It was only a few minutes before that she had come to the decision about burning the notebook, yet, dragged by some irresistible impulse, she sprang up and followed him. The conductor tried to stop her, but she brushed his hand aside and jumped.

It is not every person who understands the right way to dismount from a car traveling at the rate of ten miles an hour. The street came up to meet Isobel Biddle, bounced her

playfully two or three times and then rolled her over and over in the dust. She felt that it was a knock-out blow from Nemesis. As she was rolled over she prayed that she might be killed. She had no wish to live. She wanted to die so that she could forget the sufferings that she had endured since her arrival in New York.

When she opened her eyes after what seemed a long, long interval, she gave a little gasp of astonishment when she found Willoughby bending over her.

"Are you hurt?" he cried anxiously.

"No, no," shrieked the girl.

She was horror-stricken. The man into whose secrets she had been prying was the first to rush to her assistance. Fate had evidently determined to make her punishment complete. She was to be a warning to all busybodies — a creature battered mercilessly for interfering in the matrimonial troubles of strangers.

A little crowd was gathering, and the peering eyes that seemed to burrow into the soul of the girl made her clutch the man's arm. She thought the white-faced watchers were aware of her shame. She was lying there like something Fate had stunned for their inspection.

"Oh, help me away from here," she stammered. "Please, oh, please!"

The man assisted her readily, and with his assistance she struggled to her feet and limped painfully away till the inquisitive crowd was left behind. Then the girl dropped his supporting arm and propped herself against the railings of an areaway.

"I shall be all right now, thank you," she said feebly; "I will go home in a minute."

But the man was not certain that she had recovered from the fall. He maintained that she was hurt more seriously than she would admit, and he made an attempt to help her along.

"Don't!" she cried angrily. "Stop!"

"Why?" he questioned, surprised at her indignation.

"Because," she stammered. "I — I —"

"Please let me assist you," he interrupted. "I feel that I am responsible for the mishap. You followed my bad example in stepping off the car after it had started."

Isobel Biddle was humiliated and ashamed. She wanted to

cry — to shriek out. It seemed as if invisible hands were choking her. She leaned heavily against the railings, and Willoughby, noting her tight-drawn lips and white face, grasped her arm and prevented her from falling.

"You must sit down — you are on the verge of collapse."

"I am not!" she retorted. "Go away, sir!"

But her protests were useless. The door of an old-fashioned restaurant was but a few paces away, and the man half carried the fainting girl inside and placed her in a chair. A nimble waiter brought a glass of wine, but Isobel Biddle would not touch it. A lump came up in her throat and challenged her to attempt any swallowing feats. The man was much concerned.

"I'll take you home and call a doctor," he cried, and he rushed to the door to hail a conveyance.

The girl alarmed the proprietor of the restaurant by her excited protests, and Willoughby returned to his seat. The pain in her ankle increased, and her brain seemed to be swelling under the humiliation she was undergoing.

It was at that moment that Willoughby pushed across the table the notebook in which the girl had kept a record of his wanderings during the preceding two days, and observing her start of surprise, he explained how it had come into his possession.

"I picked it up when you fell from the car," he said, "and I carried it till you had recovered your wits."

Isobel Biddle stared at him for a moment and then burst into tears. She forgot everything but her own foolishness, and sobbed mightily. Willoughby renewed his entreaties to be allowed to call medical help, and every word that he uttered increased her punishment.

"It isn't my ankle," sobbed the girl. "It is this — *this!*"

In a sudden fit of recklessness she picked up the notebook, opened it at the page that she had cried over, and thrust it towards him.

"Read that!" she cried. "Read it, and I will explain afterwards." Then she put her face between her hands and wept. She knew that she had made a fearful mess of everything.

After a long silence Willoughby asked quietly:

"What does it mean? You have been following me."

Then Isobel Biddle sobbed out the truth. She concealed nothing. She told him her name; told him of the death of her father, of her arrival in New York, and how she had obtained the position that gave her the opportunity of investigating his movements as shown in the little tear-stained notebook.

She intended to wind up the confession with an earnest plea on behalf of the little woman in the Riverside Drive, and at the same time read him a lesson on the sinfulness of his action in taking a lady to the opera, but when she had finished her explanation of the notes, Willoughby lay back in his chair and sent forth a mighty peal of laughter that echoed through the room. It was a tremendous laugh. It shook the curtains as it raced out into the avenue, and the girl stared at him, indignant and tearful. He was making fun of her efforts to expose his deceitful conduct.

"Oh, oh, oh," he shouted. "What a joke! What a Gargantuan joke!" Then he went off into another fit of laughter.

Isobel Biddle gripped the table and struggled to her feet, her eyes blazing with indignation.

"You — you brute!" she gasped, as she thought of the little fair-haired child-wife. "You are devoid of shame."

Willoughby was serious in a moment. Springing to his feet he endeavored to support Miss Biddle as she staggered towards the door, but the girl wrenched her arm away from his grasp.

"Leave me alone," she cried; "go — go home to your wife."

"I haven't one," he retorted, calmly. Then as the girl turned and stared at him, he added: "I'm Victor Willoughby's good-for-nothing brother Jack. Letty evidently didn't tell you that I, as well as Victor, put up at the Tarquin, and that fool of a doorkeeper put you on the trail of the wrong man."

Isobel Biddle collapsed then. Shame, rage, disappointment, and a monster wave of relief, swept over her unnerved frame, and she succumbed, Jack Willoughby catching her in his arms as she lurched forward.

She didn't remember what she said or what she did after that. She had a dim idea that Jack Willoughby, in spite of protests and insults, brought her home, and she remembered sobbing hysterically while the landlady bathed her injured ankle and soothed her with kind words till she fell asleep.

It was late next morning when the girl awoke, and with the memory of the awful blunder, came consoling thoughts that trickled like balm upon her soul. "It was the wrong man," she murmured, "the wrong, wrong man — thank Heaven."

It wasn't the little woman's husband who had taken the brunette to the opera. It was an unattached bachelor who could flirt with whom he pleased. The world seemed good after all, and she decided that she would write to Mrs. Willoughby resigning her post and asking for time to pay back the twenty dollars.

She had just arrived at this decision when the bedroom door opened slowly, and next moment the pale sweet face of Mrs. Victor Willoughby peered into the room.

"Oh, my dear girl," she cried, rushing to the bedside and throwing her arms round Isobel's neck. "Oh, you poor unfortunate girl, how you must have suffered! Jack has told me all about you, and he sent me over this morning to take care of you."

Miss Biddle started to cry, but the woman kissed her.

"Oh, I am so glad you made the mistake," she continued. "I'm so glad you didn't follow Victor. I — I told him all, dear, and he proved it to be a horrid mistake."

Mrs. Willoughby sat down upon the bed and petted the girl, and the two laughed and cried over the adventure till lunch-time. Then the joyful wife insisted that the amateur detective should lunch with her, and although the girl protested, she helped her down-stairs into the waiting automobile and whirled her away up to Riverside Drive.

Three months afterwards, on the morning of Jack Willoughby's marriage to Miss Isobel Banks Biddle, Tompkins, the hall porter at the Tarquin Club, the man who had received the dollar bill on the morning Isobel arrived in New York, resigned his position and joined the Willoughby household in the capacity of head butler. It was Tompkins' stupidity that made Miss Isobel Biddle trail the wrong man — the right man as matters eventually turned out.

In the Matter of Prophecy.*

BY MILTON PRICE HARLEY.

"YOU know the type, Mrs. Ford," continued the captain, "extremely dark, fine featured, oily black hair, black turban and sunshade, peddling silks and shawls in the summer hotels, always quiet, always intelligent, always mysterious."

Janet nodded eager assent. She had long felt a certain awe and horror of these dark visitors from the Far East. She was intensely interested. The bright day and splendid blue of the ocean, the tanned and sturdy Captain in his blue uniform, the clean white of the bridge, and below them the deep hum of the ship, made a strange setting for the story, strong in its vivid contrast.

"Well, I finally told him what I wanted, as though he did not know already. It seemed that I would dream (he explained this) some vital circumstance in my own life — right, or not right, depending on my mental condition, whether my mind was submissive to his entirely or only partially.

"He lit some peculiar incense on a table directly in front of me. I remember him sitting opposite me, holding my attention with those black eyes of his, and the sickening fumes from the incense curling up between us. Then I grew faint and drowsy and lost myself in a sort of mist.

"That was all. I never knew I slept until he woke me up. But in that interval, Mr. Ford, I lived through the loss of the *Tuscan,* down to the slightest detail as it occurred two weeks later."

The Captain gazed off into the pale north, thoughtfully.

"That happened nine years ago, and until this passage I have never seen him again. You can understand, there-

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fore, how it stirred me to find him on board here."

"What a strange, strange experience!" Janet backed to the rail, crowding close to her husband. "Why, Harrison, think what it means, dear —"

The Captain was speaking again, and she turned to him with troubled eyes, while Harrison held her gently.

"So I must ask you, Mr. Ford, not to repeat the story. A thing like that does not look well in the reports."

Harrison Ford was not deeply impressed with the Captain's story. He was a tall, lean man of thirty-eight, intelligent and self-composed far beyond the ordinary, and of pleasant and forceful personality. From his college days his easy, logical strength had impressed, swayed, over-ruled, until now he stood alone, the head of a tremendous corporation, a figure known and respected in the highest business circles of New York and Boston.

He was, in his quiet, steady way, a philosopher. He looked invariably on the bright side of things, or he simply did not look. He aimed always at the normal. His trained mind thrust aside as unworthy of consideration, the extreme, the mysterious, the unnatural, both in business and in his private life. He always thought of Janet more as a child than in any other light — one to be amused, humored, and brought up carefully and unobtrusively to his own standard of mentality. On the other hand, his entire life was focused on her. It was for her that he was what he was. It was through her that he was enabled to maintain his high standard of life.

Actually, to a limited degree, Janet was a child for her years. She had a vivid imagination to which she often gave free rein. She was a dreamer always, impractical, impressionable. She was far from being egotistical, never realizing her own powers of attraction, even in her ability to interest herself. Harrison was her ideal, a man alone, of all men. She never hoped to attain to his scope of mind; she was absolutely happy in her ability to love, admire, and idolize him.

Her finely strung nature was keenly sensitive to the beauty and vividness of life. She loved nature, and especially she loved the sea. Under its influence she was transported into ecstasies of feeling, grave or gay, as the mood of the ocean. The sharp

contrasts of life, its mysteries and tragedies, thrilled and interested her intensely. She was young — much younger than Harrison — and she did not wish to grow old, to lose her sharp imagination, or her acute sense of appreciation. Her love for Harrison was her harbor of refuge from which she could look out into those wonders of life, unafraid, could loose her imagination fearlessly in its mysteries. Captain Anderson's story made a deep impression on her. While Harrison put it from his thoughts as inexplainable and unnatural, Janet lost herself completely in its strangeness.

During the next few days her mind dwelt incessantly on the subject. She chattered of it to Harrison, who listened tolerantly, amused at her enthusiasm and interest. He thought it would not endure for long. The *Liverpool* sped steadily eastward through glorious weather, and Janet, always on deck in the September sunlight, dreamed under the spell of the sea. Contrary to Harrison's opinion, her moods accentuated, rather than diminished in her mind the reality and mystery of the story. She watched the Hindoo from the promenade deck. She saw the somber eyes, the sphinx-like face, the clean-cut profile like a silhouette, on the deck below. And she resolved deep in her heart that he should tell her fortune, make her dream a page from her own future life, before the voyage was ended.

Harrison opposed the plan strongly, not because it broke the rules under which he lived — Janet was often exempt from them — but that he feared she would have a disagreeable experience. She, however, was clever. She knew how to handle him, and win him over, when she wished to, far better than he suspected. She enlisted Captain Anderson on her side:

"I would like to see it done, Mr. Ford, not that I doubt myself, understand, but I would like to see some one else try it. Mrs. Ford is so happy, and you are so comfortably fixed in life, surely nothing bad can come of it."

The Hindoo was willing (Janet brought about the interview). It seemed he had noticed the lady. He thought there was something, he was not sure — no, he would take nothing for his services. So Harrison gave reluctant consent, and the Captain made the arrangements.

They assembled in the tiny saloon reserved for use of the officers. It was far aft, beyond the galley, and could be reached only by members of the ship's company. As a further precaution against disturbance the Captain locked the door on the inside.

"It is most important that no one shall ever hear of this." He spoke nervously. "As important as it was in the case of the *Tuscan*." Nine years had failed to quiet his agitation in the presence of this man.

"I understand," said the Hindoo, with strong accent. He stood quietly with folded arms, facing the little group at the far side of the table. Janet caught the glimmer of white teeth between the black lips when he spoke. She was terribly nervous. Her mind and brain seemed hopelessly confused. She tried in vain to regain her composure. But always she found herself gazing with growing horror at that somber figure and inscrutable countenance across the table, whose eyes seemed to encounter no barrier when they met hers. Harrison, mechanically fingering an unlit cigarette, for once felt the situation beyond his control. He deeply regretted that he had sanctioned the thing, he even feared its results, but he felt powerless to intervene.

"We are ready, then?" Again the accent. Janet nodded weakly. "If your mind does not submit entirely to mine, your dream may not be accurate. There are influences here." He looked at Harrison. "It would be better if we were alone."

"Never!" exclaimed Harrison. The Hindoo acquiesced with a bow.

He seated her at the table, and instructed the two men to remain quiet at the end of the room. Taking a chair directly opposite Janet he produced a capsule and a small brass plate which he placed midway between them. Then turning toward the Captain and Harrison, who were silently watching him, he said:

"Remember, do not interrupt for any reason whatever. It is dangerous to the subject."

With his attention concentrated on Janet, he carefully lighted the capsule, which sent up a thin spiral of smoke. It smoldered and glowed on the little square of brass, while the smoke drifted about in the slight air-currents. Janet sat motionless, chin in

her hands, her eyes held by the unwinking stare of the Hindoo. The penetrating incense, rapidly surrounding her, calmed her, soothed her, numbed her sensibilities. She grew less conscious of the dark face opposite her. She thought of Harrison. She could not quite picture him in her mind. She half recalled that she ought not to think of Harrison. Why must she not, she wondered vaguely. And how dim he seemed in her memory, how unreal! The smoke curled up more and more thickly. She could not see through it — She could no longer speak — She was suffocating! If she could only reach Harrison! She flung herself forward. She tried to grasp his coat. Her fingers would not close. She felt him slipping away from her, away, away.

* * * * * * *

Midsummer at a watering-place on the Atlantic Coast of the Middle Atlantic States; afternoon of a melancholy and forboding day, a strange day, with big winds from the east, and hurrying white piles of clouds running before the wind; a day of premonitions and vague all-pervading warnings; a day of great noise and tumult in the air; a day of uneasiness and restless nervous excitement. Horses showed it in their unusual restiveness. The few people on the streets seemed to be walking with undue haste; those more highly strung particularly showed the effect of the atmospheric condition by their nervous glances at the heavens.

Half a mile away the pounding surf seemed to be the high-beating pulse of the day; while the skies between the white-winged clouds showed copper and purplish tints as of impending storm.

Janet quickening her steps down the long road toward the beach, felt acutely the strain on nerves and mind. She gazed almost with terror at the swaying tree-tops showing the silver on each leaf, and at the dust picked up and hurled away in clouds by the wind, along with bits of paper and dry leaves. She listened almost fearfully for the vague unheard warnings that filled the air — unheard, yet felt in every nerve in her body — blown in from horizons farther than ship ever sailed. And she heard the thunder of the breakers, an accom-

paniment she thought to the hurried beatings of her heart.

Rattle of hoofs on the macadam road answered the unspoken question in her mind.

Through the dust-clouds he came at headlong speed, ears back, eyes rolling white with terror, the light, empty runabout swaying from side to side at each leap. She had a fleeting glimpse of his white foam-flecked sides, the trailing reins, his distended nostrils red as fire; and then, fainter and fainter on her confused and ringing ears the rattling hoof-beats of the run-away.

"God!" she exclaimed, and hastened dizzily on into the wind.

A block from the beach she paused breathless with fresh terror; people running on the board-walk, cries and shouts, and a scream from a woman fainting in a flutter of assisting hands. And then, far and hoarse and distinct on the shoulders of the wind, the shocking, agonized cry for help — once, twice, three times — and her heart jumped and fluttered into a violent palpitation.

Through the immense crowd of now silent, curious people the girl picked her way, faint and dizzy, but impelled by some strange desire or fear; through to the little inmost circle of serious-faced men, with the doctors kneeling over the inert body of a man in a bathing suit; through that little circle and down on her knees beside the two doctors.

She was conscious of their pity at her cry, "Quick, the face," and then, as they gently turned the body over, while her heart seemed bursting, and the little circle swayed and swam before her dimming eyes, her elbow was seized violently from behind and she gazed over her shoulder into the black familiar face of a Hindoo, with gleaming teeth and black turban —

"You dream long and violently, I thought best to arouse you."

"The doctors said — Oh, God! the air! the air!"

* * * * * * *

Janet never told what the dream was. That her nervous system had been terribly shaken was evident. Harrison, much concerned, wisely gave up questioning her after the first few days.

"And it was really so bad, dear?" They were on the bridge again, being privileged. It was their last day at sea.

"It was horrible, Harrison, perfectly horrible!" Janet looked at him sadly, her face pale and drawn. Harrison noted the strange intensity of her look.

"I shall never tell you! You must stop questioning me about it! I want to get away from this ship, away from the nearness of the thing, out somewhere in the quiet country where I can think, and compose myself again."

Harrison held himself solely to blame. To Captain Anderson's anxious and self-reproachful queries he answered accordingly. On their arrival in Liverpool he rushed Janet away into the peace and quiet of old England, there to forget and cease her brooding once and for all. During the weeks that followed he exerted upon her all the strength of his pleasant personality. And Janet improved spiritually and physically day by day, week by week, until she could with safety look back on her experience, could even allow herself to wonder and marvel at its strangeness and vividness.

Lapse of time and change of scene are powerful aids in softening and dimming disagreeable memories. For several months Harrison and his wife traveled leisurely on the Continent. Janet was now in the best of health and spirits. The dream no longer worried and upset her to any great extent. It had assumed in her mind the proportions of a thing apart from all her life, to be called forth only in her deepest and most pensive moods. Whether she believed in it or not was a question she never allowed herself to consider. Meanwhile, Harrison, happy in Janet's happiness, and frequently occupied with his business interests, had completely forgotten the experience.

It was early spring when pressure of his affairs finally recalled him to New York. Janet wanted to wait for the *Liverpool* and Captain Anderson, but lack of time compelled them to return by a faster steamer. The ensuing months were busy ones indeed. Janet, impractical, only knew that some great railroad had been taken over and that Harrison's presence was required constantly at the office in the reorganization that followed.

When summer came they found it expedient to remain within easy reach of town instead of making their customary ocean voyage. So they selected Long Point on the Atlantic Coast, and

took a comfortable cottage there. Janet soon grew to love the place intensely. It was on a narrow strip of beautiful country some seventy miles from New York. Eastward, a block from their house, lay the broad expanse of the Atlantic, while the blue waters of the Bay were within easy reach on the western side. Harrison came down from town as often as he could. He found the roads excellent for his car, and the Bay well suited to his forty-foot *Wanderer*. Janet had a wide acquaintance in the summer colony and time hung lightly on her hands.

The sea in its varying moods charmed and enchanted her. She passed many happy days lost in the dazzle of sun and sand. She bathed much when Harrison was away. He cared more for the Bay, or to drive his car over the splendid roads of the surrounding country. It was a glorious summer and Janet basked and dreamed in a very ecstasy of happiness. The dream was stored away in some recess of her mind, to be reviewed and considered only at long intervals. It no longer caused her any anxiety, it had almost ceased to thrill her. True, that road from the station to the beach at Long Point might well have been the road of her dream, but she had seen other roads as similar.

One afternoon in late July Janet padded along the wet sand in her bathing suit. It was a somewhat threatening day, with a strong easterly wind, and uneasy surf. A certain melancholy mood had come upon her as it often did before an impending storm. She sat down suddenly and let the wash of the breakers touch her. Harrison would not be down until late that night she remembered. Something in the day perhaps had recalled again the dream to her mind. She felt the tenseness of the atmosphere, as though she were on the verge of something tremendous and terrible. She saw the fast clouding and copper-colored sky, and the darkening ocean white-capped to the horizon. It looked infinitely dangerous. The rising tide rushed against her strongly. The dream came back to her with more and more vividness. She was glad Harrison was in New York.

* * * * * * *

It was terrifically hot in the city. Blazing sun on burning, dirty streets, sweltering cars, and the discordant city noises all

combined to wilt and wear down any philosophical spirits who tried to ignore the weather. Harrison passed a horrible and useless morning at the office. He could not get down to any real business. He fumed and fussed, he was irritable, restless, unreasonable. At one o'clock he gave it up and went to the club.

Thoughts of Janet had been cropping up in his mind all morning; had helped to baffle his efforts at concentration on business. Time after time he caught himself back on board the *Liverpool* on that disagreeable adventure with the fortune-teller. It was strange, he thought, that she should never tell the dream she had there. And what a wreck it made of her for a few weeks! Strange indeed. He should talk to her about it now, find out what it was. Perhaps she still felt that terrible fear of what it was or might be. Harrison wondered vaguely why he had never pushed his investigations further. Janet would think it was rather late in the day, now. Well, he had to admit that he had not given it much thought for many months. He wondered at the insistence of the memory. Why should it come now, so much more serious than he had ever considered it before? Why should he be worried and upset this way on such a day, the most unbearable he had spent in town?

He summoned a waiter. "William, telephone Mr. Cartwright that I'll not play golf with him this afternoon. Say I've been called to the shore. Order me a cab in twenty minutes."

He subsided into his chair. Janet would laugh if she knew why he was changing all his plans, and rushing down to Long Point on the 2.30 train. Well, she should never know. He would say that he could not stand the heat in the city another instant. That was true.

He ordered brandy to ease his mind of its whirling thoughts. In induced composure he went carefully over the case. Why did this thing spring up from the past to so startle him, to so discompose him, to finally overwhelm him completely? Why could he not shake his mind clear of its unknown terror? Why could he not convince himself it was heat? He glanced finally at the clock. Five minutes had passed since he ordered the cab.

* * * * * * *

The 2.30 train was nearly deserted as Harrison stumbled

through to the chair car. Two or three friends received no sign of recognition to their greetings in his blurred eye and vacant white face. He collapsed in a chair and started terrifically as his eyes rested on a turbaned Indian standing in the doorway.

"Sick, old man?" asked an acquaintance, hand on his shoulder. He nodded weakly. "Heat," he lied, and turned his head to the window.

The soothing drone of the train bored insistently into his tired brain. Lickety-lickety-lockety, over frogs and switches, through yards covered with traffic, freight, engines, coaches, and shining rails snaking in and out. Lickety-lickety-lickety-lickety, faster and faster. Cross-roads fled by with glimpses of waving hands and a waiting team or two. Once Harrison saw a plunging white horse flash by, a yard from his face. It struck some chord in his memory, that white, rearing horse. He tried vainly to call to mind the connection. He felt that the baffling half-memory was of an incident foreign to his own life.

Two hours later at Long Point station Harrison left the train. He was in a frenzy of haste and nervousness. He was doubting seriously and hopelessly his sanity, and he was oppressed by a fear of impending disaster beyond the limits of his conception. Fear of what? He did not know.

He dared not trust himself in a hack, but hurried off down the long road to the beach. To reach Janet was his all-consuming desire.

Great white clouds were hurrying in from the east. Between them Harrison caught glimpses of the ominous and copper-colored heavens. The reverberation of the distant surf was borne to his ears on the wind; and up the street whirled clouds of dust and leaves and bits of fluttering paper.

Again he had the sensation of remembering something that had never happened. There was some similarity in the day, the wind, the flying dust-clouds, to some elusive recollection.

Rattling hoof-beats struck in on his confused ears, and he stood petrified with horror as a wild-eyed white horse and empty lurching runabout thundered by in a whirling dust-cloud.

"The runaway!" he gasped, not knowing what he said, and hurried on.

People waving arms and running on the board-walk. People hurrying out of cottages and the hotels and streaming down the short block to the beach. The palpitations of his heart made him stop and gasp for breath. And clearly he saw a woman scream and faint amid a flurry of assisting men at the head of the street.

Piercing and repeated shrieks for help rang in his ears clear above the uproar and confusion. Three times it came, and he staggered back as from a blow.

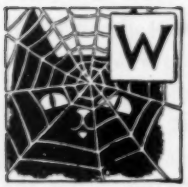
Next instant, tearing off his coat, he was flying down the street running as he had never run before. He tore his way through the now silent crowd, driven on by over-powering impulse. Right through the inmost circle he burst, speechless, choking for breath.

"Janet!" he cried, and the doctors caught him as he fell on his knees beside the body.

Dizzy, he swayed from side to side between the two doctors; the circle of faces swam before his dimming eyes, and the thunder of his heart was bursting his ear-drums, when his elbow was seized violently from behind, and he looked over his shoulder into the black face of a Hindoo with gleam of teeth and somber turban.

The Collapse of Billie Buttons.*

BY MARY MORRISON RAYNAL.



ILLIAM BURTON, to his intimates Billie Burton, or oftener Billie Buttons, was the adored only son of his mother. It was she who had created the myth of his feeble health, thus withholding him from the practice of law; though there were those of his friends who held that Billie had become a barrister merely by way of passing two more pleasant years at the University.

He was a good boy, his mother would say, with the innocent conviction that Billie's goodness gilded his ineffectualness. But with it all he was no fool, when he was not giving a representation of Sousa's Band on a mouth-harp, Billie could discuss, with enthusiasm, some dry-as-bones essay in a British Review.

Being a good boy, he did not pine for riotous companions, but all of the force of his sweet, shallow nature spent itself in adoration of whatever girl happened to be at hand. She need not necessarily be a pretty girl, Billie Buttons was an idealist who could read beauty into anything of the feminine shape. How he had escaped captivity was a mystery, for Billie was lovable as well as loving; but by a sort of guileless guilefulness he always managed to elude matrimony. With their modest income, the maintenance of a third party would have been an inconvenience to both Billie and his mother.

I first met the pair, mother and son, at the beach, where, to the murmur of moon-kissed waves, Billie was warbling love songs to a winsome débutante. It was unethical in Billie's eyes to make love to two girls at once, but he continually felt the need of another girl to whom he might chant the praises of his lady when the lady herself was unattainable; hence his reputation as a flirt, it being difficult for the public to differentiate between what Billie

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termed a "rare friendship" and a love affair. But I, who have played second fiddle to Billie through many summers, can testify to his single heartedness.

Last June, as I traveled toward a secluded valley of the Blue Ridge, I thought, with a lonely pang, of Billie, his ardors had so become a part of my vacation. Upon arriving at the little mountain inn, however, I was rejoiced by the sight of a pair of lovers lounging in the shadow of a patriarchal fir. The devoted pose was unmistakable, Billie Buttons again held the center of my stage.

The leading lady this time was a fascinating little Creole, who had fled from the heat of her Louisiana plantation.

"She has an unpronounceable little French name, so I call her Mollie — my Mollie Bawn," said Billie, when it was time for me to be confided in. "I've made a little verse about her:

In the golden summer-time
Mollie stole my heart from me,
Now she glories in the crime,
Calls it petty larceny.

"Oh, Billie, Billie! what a fib artist you are. You cribbed that out of an old magazine. I know the woman who wrote it."

"Really, you are unkind," protested Billie. "If I read it, it was longer ago than I can remember. I thought I'd written it myself."

"But, as for your Mollie Bawn, why don't you marry her? She is irresistible."

"And she has a sugar plantation," supplemented Billie, contentedly.

"It's time you were settling down; you are almost forty, aren't you, Billie?"

"Almost forty, and a worse spoiled boy than I was at twenty," his tone was bitter. "I've gray hairs and I've crow's feet, and still I am nothing but Billie Buttons."

"Soon to be Mr. William Burton, the sugar king."

Billie, grinning foolishly, dropped the sore subject of his ineffectualness.

To one who had followed the intricacies of Billie's love-makings through the seasons, the difference in this case was significant.

He was humbled, unsure of himself. The little heiress's plantation made marriage with her possible, yet it was not for her money that Billie would marry her, he was genuinely and seriously in love. As his devotion increased so did his self-depreciation, until his chivalrous notion that he should protect her against himself made it doubtful whether he would ever ask her to marry him.

Despite his qualms he was deliriously happy. But just as the tide leading on to fortune was at its flow, it received a terrific check.

The rural deliveryman had handed out his letters, for Billie a single letter in a determined hand. At sight of the writing he paled, after reading it he was white to the lips, with a look of fright in his round childlike eyes. Presently he disappeared down the rhododendron walk.

"I'm afraid Mr. Burton has had bad news," murmured the little Creole, troubled, wistful to share his sorrow with him.

Night had fallen before Billie reappeared to beckon me out to the shadow of the fir: "Partner, I'm in the deuce of a fix."

Explanation was long in coming, finally: "You remember when my mother was so ill in the spring? We had a trained nurse for her, a Miss Malinda Evans. She was capable, and er — strong-minded. She looked like a horse."

"But horses are beautiful, Billie."

"Not when they are gaunt and raw-boned," miserably.

"Then how did you happen — "

"She saved my mother's life," with despairing finality. "Poor little Mother had nervous prostration, and was so set on dying that I was out of my wits with anxiety. Then Miss Evans came to boss her into getting well."

"Still, I don't quite understand your obligation."

"I was so eternally grateful, I told her she was an angel. I — held her hand oftener than was prudent. I was so upset, see?"

"But that was weeks ago."

"I told her if she was ever near to send for me. She's sent."

"Where is she?"

"Over in Asheville nursing a 'bug.'"

"Nursing what?"

"A tubercular patient. She will be whiter and starchier than

ever, and smell of antiseptics." Every fiber in his being cringed.

"Billie, she is a designing old maid, she shan't have you!" I cried, in passionate protest. "You've wiggled out of worse scrapes than this. Surely you aren't going?"

"I was never up against a Miss Evans before. I'm afraid I am going."

There was a deadly suffocating quality in his misery, before which argument shriveled in despair. The woman must have hypnotized him.

The next morning Billie was gone without a word of farewell.

A few weeks later a suspiciously heavy white envelope came to me. From its steel-clad contents, I learned of the marriage at the Battery Park of Miss Malinda Evans and Mr. William Burton.

Poor Billie Buttons!

Art's Reciprocity.*

BY RUSSELL PETTIS ASKUE.

T is not becoming in an author to make "I's" in his story. For that reason I had hoped this one might be told from the viewpoint of Oliver Twist. For Oliver is modest—and blind. Besides, he knows much more about the hero than I do. But a serious difficulty lay in the fact that he had never met the heroine. That pleasure having been mine, Oliver insisted that I tell the story. So here goes.

Madame Ada Taunert was studying carefully the cover of a weekly magazine. It was adorned with the head of a baby with wide-open mouth and tightly closed eyes; the mouth omitting shrill cries of woe (simply because of the limitations of graphic art) while the tightly closed lids somehow permitted the egress of large, round, realistic tears.

As she gazed upon the unhappy infant countenance its misery reflected itself upon her own face. "*Armes Kind,*" she cooed soothingly, and folded the magazine tenderly to her breast. "Bad world—bad people!" she declared reproachfully; "why do they make the babies weep?" She bestowed a kiss upon the little woe-begone face, then sat down at her piano, and—and I, reposing in an easy chair near by, let my thoughts carry me back to the man who had made the baby cry.

* * * * * * *

Who ever heard of an artist with long legs and short red hair? And who ever heard the name of Bob applied to such attributes and appendages? Yet such was Bob Alden. The red-hair side of his nature had triumphed in many crises, and the legs had always held their ground. He could appreciate a funny situation on an empty stomach, and grin when editors told him his stuff lacked humor.

But don't misunderstand. These heights of philosophy he had not attained at a single bound. Upon leaving Art School he was at first inclined to proceed at once to Europe and paint crowned heads.

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But lacking passage, resolved to devote himself to magazine work. Then it became his desire to punch editorial heads.

The path from pugilistic aspirations to grins was long, and the journey had taken a year. But on the way he learned many things. He became reconciled to the occupation of the front pages by Harry Fisher and Jimmy Flagg, and was happy to find himself tucked in among the advertisers. And about the time that he discovered that editors were human, one of them commissioned him to paint a cover. Now this painting is the spool about which our thread of narrative is wound. Let's unwind.

I entered Bob's studio on a bright April morning. Through an open window floated the voices of Spring. A huckster chanting his wares, a rag picker calling for yours; boys in the vacant lot playing *bawl;* a carpet beater beating a dirge of dust; a colored Caruso cleaning the cellar.

Bob was accustomed to having me drop in upon him. My apartments being situated on the floor above I didn't have far to drop, and so he didn't mind. He had merely nodded upon this occasion. That greeting did not in any wise interrupt his industry—he was whistling a ditty and painting a baby. And not until I had examined the work on his easel did he rest his brush and my ears and open the conversation. It opened with a "bang."

"Just my luck!" he growled, and I felt that he meant me. "I need a model, and I've been praying all the morning that the right chap would come for the job. Now see how my petition is answered:—I ask for a baby—and in walks a bachelor."

With his accusing eyes upon me I felt very ill at ease, and sought to calm his discontent. "You're getting on fine without one," said I, "and besides—"

At that moment there arose from the house next door the most disquieting infantile shriek I have ever had the pleasure of hearing. Full-throated, clear, and vibrant with feeling it came to our ears, drowning ingloriously the chorus of Spring.

"—and besides," I finished triumphantly, "besides—listen to that!"

Bob laid his color box carefully on the floor, and tiptoed to the window. He held his hand to his ear, listening very intently; and when I started to speak he whispered a warning "Sh—," and cautioned me with an emphatic gesture of the other hand. He remained in this attentive attitude until the young vocal volcano had ceased its eruption, and then turned to me.

"I thought for a minute," said he, "that I heard something. But I

must have been mistaken, 'cause the baby in that house never cries."

"Never cries!" I gasped. "Are you deaf, or am I crazy?"

"I am not prepared to answer your entire question," he replied; "let it suffice to say that I am not deaf. An hour ago I was quite sure I heard what you seem to have imagined hearing, and I asked the lady next door if I might borrow her baby. Of course she asked what I wanted him for, and I was fool enough to inform her. I told her I was trying to draw a youngster crying, and desired to make a study of the real thing in action.

"And what do you suppose that woman does? She reaches down, picks up the kid and snuggles him under her arm, like this, as if she was afraid I'd carry him off. Then she points toward the door and says 'Go! You have insulted me—go! My che-il! never cries'!"

Bob had scarcely ended this dramatic impersonation before he dashed back to the window and hurriedly lowered the sash. "Oh, no, I didn't hear anything," he explained. "But speaking of sound, that's the only part of our young neighbor with which I am intimately acquainted, and the only part of him that can't go into a picture."

He took up his colors and brushes and resumed his work while he continued his talk. "Now here's the situation: I must keep the pot boiling by selling this cover drawing; I haven't any kid to sit and cry at me, and that young man and his mamma have discouraged me from any further attempts to acquire by borrowing, stealing or adopting. What can I do?" he asked with mock dejection, at the same time reaching toward his table. "Presto—behold my model!" And he held before my startled eyes a photograph.

It had been clipped from an old newspaper, and below it were the words, "Captain Murphy's Football Face."

Then while I watched in wondering silence, Robert Alden transposed the broadly grinning features of the football hero into the troubled face of a baby. Perhaps I have said enough, but there was another detail of the work which interested me exceedingly. There were no tears upon the face of Captain Murphy. But he painted seven or eight on the baby's cheeks—he used the globe of an electric light as a model.

Bob had painted thus, with laughter and levity. But the work of his hands was good. The baby face had received the critical approval of the editor sitting at his desk. A baby tear had fallen upon his open check book, blotting out some figures he had written

there. And when he wrote again the new figures were larger than the old. Bob was at last coming into his own.

* * * * * * *

Ah Art! charming, lovable. Of all feminine affection, whose so fond as hers! And who, at times, can be so false as she? Since early childhood Madame Taunert had striven to win the lady's favor, and her devotion had been abundantly rewarded. Art had smiled upon her, and been very gracious unto her. Through the years of preparation she had walked at the pianist's side, a helpful friend. She had been to Madame a warm and loving friend, only to desert her now in the hour of her great need.

For Madame was to give her first concert in America, under the most inspiring auspices she had ever known. The hour was at hand, but her inspiration had fled. False, deceiving Art! Steal her song from the nightingale; from a lily her perfume. Pluck the pinions from an eagle and tear from the disciple his faith. Then if you wish to crown your fiendish labors, entice from the true artist his muse.

Late in the afternoon I called upon Madame; entering, unwittingly, where angels should have come. Under my arm I carried a magazine, which I laid upon a table. Madame spied the cover and gazed upon it long and thoughtfully. Then she forgot me—forgot everything—and seated herself at the piano. The soul of Music had returned.

* * * * * * *

Bob and I sat in the front row of the balcony. Madame, tall and graceful, and gowned with pleasing simplicity, greeted her audience shyly. Her bashfulness disappeared with the beginning of each number, and returned with the applause which marked its close. And to me it seemed her very artlessness lent a charm to her art.

The last number on the program was played, and Madame retired; but the people insisted on more. She returned and for a moment sat motionless upon the bench. Then softly and sweetly the music rose from her fingers. There were sad little diminuendos, followed by tender, comforting notes that rose to gladness.

Unnamed on the program, unknown to its hearers, I was sure the music still spoke to them all. The old man might have heard the echo of a life that was passing, and the soft-spoken promise of a brighter to come. The maiden could hear love's stream breaking over the dark rocks, or feel it gliding in the sunshine. But I knew

that it represented the sorrow of all earth's children, and the sweet comfort of a mother's lullaby. There was no applause when Madame had finished—only the full-hearted tribute of silence.

I wanted Bob to meet Madame, but he left me and hurried away while I went in search of her to offer my congratulations. She would not listen. "No, no!" she protested in her precise English. "It was not I; it was the wonderful artist that painted the baby. He made the music."

As I climbed to my rooms I noticed a light in Bob's studio. The door was slightly ajar and I saw him sitting on a couch. He had not heard me. He had his hat on his head, his pipe in his mouth, and he was talking to Oliver. (Now perhaps I couldn't help hearing, and perhaps I was eavesdropping,—let it rest that way.)

Oliver Twist sat in a chair near Bob, dressed in a raincoat and old slouch hat. His face was twisted attentively to one side in a manner peculiar to him. "I don't know what it was she played," said Bob, (as though continuing a conversation) "but she painted with her music a wonderful picture. And I saw two pictures, hers and mine, side by side. Mine, this caricature of a kid with glass tears. Hers a real baby, with less tears, but more sorrow; the sort of baby a woman would cuddle on her breast, and sing to sleep, and raise to be a man."

Oliver said never a word. How could he? He was only a lay figure—a dummy; with a sympathetic heart and a body of canvas and straw. Bob would never have confided such matters to any one else. And now you know why Oliver is in the story—and the real reason for his not telling it.

"I wish," said Bob, as he blew a cloud of smoke in Oliver's face, "I wish some time I might really paint something—something that would touch the heart of an artist like Madame!"

The Toll.*

BY W. EDSON SMITH.

UMBER 3117 twisted gnarled fingers into the mane of the black horse and took a fresh grip at the rope halter. Perhaps he would not have to lose those other five and twenty years. Five years he had dwelt in that high-rimmed hell far up the valley, but now the coming of his opportunity had found him ready and waiting. It was God's own luck that someone's horse had strayed near—only a mile beyond the wall which he had scaled almost under the feet of the guard. Though it was the devil's luck that had sent the bartender of the all-night saloon at Canyon Town to the door just as the fugitive clattered by with stripes glaring vividly in the light that gleamed dully over the lintel. A quarter of an hour later Red Grawley was hot upon the trail with a last fervent injunction to the bartender.

"Say nothin' to the cursed pen' guards, Ben," he growled. "Two different times they've frisked me out of the reward. Not again! I'm goin' to get the guy and bring him back all by my lonesome so there'll be no excuse for a divvy."

And he of the apron had grunted assent. A little later the flying one heard the hoofs of Grawley's mount in a brisk, rattling cadence behind and convulsively pressed gaunt knees closer to his horse's sides.

It had been a wild undertaking to ride bareback down the canyon road to the big river thirty miles away, but no madder a risk, perhaps, than attempting the same journey on foot. That would have taken two nights of furtive stealing along the blasted-out, precipitous road—two nights at the least, with a long, throbbing, sickening day in between the nights, while he lay huddled in some cavernous cliff-pocket waiting for the man-hunters to find him or to pass him by, as might happen. With this horse that Fate had put into his hands it meant only a brave, galloping dash of a few hours—with good fortune; a plunge into the undergrowth on the banks of

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the distant river; a whistled note; the startled whir into life of a hovering launch—and he would be well along toward freedom with the wife and his own brother to help him on the way.

If only that fellow had not come to the door! All the rest had gone so well. Even having Harris for a cell-mate seemed providential. Thanks to him, every foot of the road down to the river was stretching clear and distinct in his mind. He himself had come from a distant part of the state but Harris had lived in these hills all of a weary life.

It was out of consideration for Harris that the escape had been deferred three months, until his short sentence should expire, for fear of entangling him in the bitter consequences when his companion should make a break for liberty. And it had been no slight matter to stay three months longer in hell with each day an age of torment. But, after all, it had helped—the waiting, for Harris had carried every detail of the plotted escape away with him for the benefit of the man and woman who were now hiding down the river. Everything had been included in the plans: the bribe for the guard and the two trusties, dates, places, everything. He might have had clothes and a mount of his own had it not been for the fact that strangers with extra saddle horses are viewed with distinct suspicion on the road beyond Canyon Town and the times of their comings and goings are minutely accounted for. No, he had elected to dare the flight down the canyon himself. After that it would be easy.

Number 3117 was not by nature a bold man nor was he a good rider but it chanced that he was an innocent man except in so far as a technicality had snared him. Twenty-five years of brick-making behind a high wall, in biting cold and blistering heat, twenty-five years of steel night-corridors were but twenty-five thongs to a cat o' nine tails in the hands of Horror.

He kicked at the horse's ribs and swung at a sharp canter around a jagged corner where the road was barely visible in the faint whiffs of light from the clouded, waning moon which swept above the shoulder of the hills. It was a corner overhanging a straight drop of hundreds of feet, where a prudent rider would have pulled up into a staid walk.

Number 3117 turned it recklessly and urged his horse into a gallop. Grawley, two miles to the rear, was coming at a careful trot, for Garwley, after all was said and done, valued his neck more than any reward however large. Moreover, in another hour, they would be flying straight away down a good, wide road with only

the dangerous spot at the Gate. When it came to a test of speed, Grawley knew that the game was in his own hands. He fingered the sawed-off shotgun which he kept for this sort of an emergency and grinned evilly to himself.

The man ahead of him, as it chanced, was not burdened with anxiety as to his pursuer at that particular moment. Strangely enough he was thinking of the foolish story that Harris had told: about the ruined tollhouse which would be rearing far ahead, there on the last stretch of the journey. Harris had told it to him at night after they were locked in and supposed to be deep in an exhausted sleep, told it between the rounds of the slow-footed guard. He had laughed to himself at the man's superstition, listening to the narrative under cover of the velvet darkness of the cell. But it all came back now. It had come to Harris while they were going over the hazards of the escape.

"It's good that you'll be going on foot past the tollhouse," the man had said. And then he had gone on with his whispered story, in that mad desire men have to talk when talk is a forbidden thing. "If you was on horseback, it would be a risky matter. 'Tis a haunted place!"

And at this, as a smile would have gone wasted, his audience had ventured a single, sibilant chuckle to show appreciation of the joke.

"True as I live," went on Harris insistently, "it was this way. In the early days, before this place was built, the settlers in the valley blasted out the canyon road. You see, there's a lot of people up here in the open country and around Canyon Town. It was a costly road to keep up so somebody got the idea of a tollhouse. They built it at the very mouth of the canyon where there's no other way to get by. The road winds along right above the jaggedest bunch o' rocks you ever saw and the tollhouse is buttressed into the solid rock, so that the cliff hangs over it from above with just room for the width of the road in front. It was all shipshape for a while, with its big white hinged pole breast high across the road, and a little window in th' rock wall of the tollhouse where the keeper could take the money.

"They put in a chap named MacPherson to take care of the gate, him and his wife. I've heard my grandfather tell about 'em. You know how the Scotch are, usually. Anyway, MacPherson was a hard-fisted sort and his wife was a gaunt, stern kind of woman, though she was good in her fashion, I guess. Between the two, they squeezed toll out o' every soul that passed. And there was a bunch of roughs took it so hard that, one night, they broke the door

of the house an' dragged the old man out, first tying his woman to one side where she couldn't bother. It seems they only intended to give him a lashing but after they'd been laying it on to him a while he went wild with the pain and broke away from the bar of the gate where they'd tied him up by the hands and, before any of 'em could stir a step, he jumped over the cliffs down to them rocks I was tellin' you of. Next morning folks came along from below and found the old woman still tied there and in a brain fever or something. They picked what was left of MacPherson off the rocks. The woman died next day."

The woman died next day! Number 3117, pushing his barebacked horse along the lonely night road, remembered how that phrase, the climax of his cell-mate's grim story, had impressed him—hissed from between unseen lips.

"After that, the tollhouse went to pieces all at once. The push decided on some other way of raising taxes to keep up the road so they didn't put in another keeper and nobody lived there again. There ain't much of the house left, only the rear wall and part of the front, but it's a bad corner. The old woman went ravin' crazy the night she died. My grandad knew one of the women that sat up with her. The last thing she screamed out was that everybody must have a good conscience or good toll to pass her gate."

Good conscience or good toll! Convict 3117 reeled around the last dangerous angle and settled himself for the long-strided gallop down the canyon, with its shadowing hills, out into the open world where God's starlight was mirrored on the sweeping, silent river into which flowed the roaring, impatient canyon stream.

"There's been many a one picked up there deader'n a door nail. Nobody ever hits the rocks below and gets off alive. Sometimes it's been fellows that was seemingly mighty good men. And there's pretty tough specimens rides up and down every day without gettin' it. But there's system to it all. Mulcahy, who, it leaked out, was the leader of the gang that whipped the toll-keeper, was killed there within a month afterward. And from what I've heard, all his gang must have followed him in five years—every man of them. The story is that the ghost lets them come by, goin' fast, and all at once there's a gate-bar where there wasn't anything a minute before—and there you are. But there's one way of layin' the ghost, so they say. If you throw something in at the window hole of the ruined wall, where they used to take toll—something that you wouldn't part with for love nor money—why then it's all right and you get by. Some say that's because a man has to almost stop to be sure he can toss

his toll through the place and that it's the reckless riding that causes accidents. That may all be, only there's mighty few in this country goes fast and furious at that turn nowadays."

No. 3117 was within eight miles of the tollhouse when Crawley swung into the straight stretch of road above. Crawley was mad with the lust of chase and with the thought of blood money. He rowelled his horse viciously and came down the miles of the incline, overhauling the black, stride by stride. For the black was failing, laying down on the pace. Bare heels were poor substitutes for spurs. The man in stripes beat madly at the horse's neck with the end of the rope halter that served for a rein. Yet somehow his thoughts were not centred on the real danger of quick capture though the distant clamor of hoof-beats rioted in his ears.

No, it was the unreal thing that worried him: the tollhouse ahead there, at the mouth of the canyon. Beyond, was the river and his wife and safety. All that seemed important at this moment, was something that would answer for toll. True, Harris had said that if one had a clear conscience—but how could one tell? The last five years had expiated much folly, that was sure! Had it atoned for all?

There was just one thing. He fumbled within his barred bosom and drew it forth into the darkness, fingering the object lovingly as it hung from the string knotted around his neck. It was the sole of the little girl's shoe, her first shoe after she had walked: a small round fragment worn through in the centre by a busy, scurrying foot. He had only seen the child as a baby. The piece of leather was a memento of sweet, toddling, tiny maidenhood, smuggled to him in prison by the wife.

Last year the little girl had died. He loved the memento well enough. It ought to be good enough toll for any ghost. It had kept him sane—kept him going for the last two years: looking at it and thinking that he might yet be able to make up to Janet what she had suffered. It had helped in nerving him to go through with this escape—that piece of leather. Yes, it ought to be good toll. No doubt the ghost wanted something which represented an approach to its own sufferings. That would be it. He kissed the piece of leather and then tore it with his teeth to the hole in the centre so that he could take it from the knotted cord. After,—he clutched it in his right hand.

On the other side of the canyon, a titanic pile of castled rocks loomed into sight against the starry sky. His cell-mate had told him of that landmark. It would be across the river from the old toll-